

2014 UMRCC Annual Meeting, Radisson Hotel, Lacrosse, WI

Fisheries Technical Section Meeting Notes

Submitted by Travis Moore, Section Chair, Missouri Department of Conservation

Emy Monroe updated the group on the bighead and silver carp eDNA testing protocols and results. Through March, 2014, 222 hours of electrofishing effort had been conducted and 147 miles of net had been deployed to try to catch bighead and silver carp from the Illinois River below the electrical barrier. Those efforts yielded 105,466 fish of 92 species. Only two silver carp and 30 bighead carp have been collected. The eDNA testing has yielded many positive results including numerous positives from upstream of the barrier. But they have determined that many of the positives resulted from other vectors carrying carp DNA upstream. Positives from testing in infested waters yield higher levels of DNA than from these other vectors. So, eDNA is still a useful test for detecting carps when the population increases in a designated area.

Nick Bloomfield presented information on Asian carp sampling in several pools upstream of Lock and Dam 19 at Keokuk, IA. They caught no young-of-year fish in pools 16 or 17 in 2013. 2014 efforts will focus on Pool 17 and up. Commercial harvest of bighead and silver carps in the Iowa portion of the UMR has increased over the last few years and occurred primarily in pools 16 – 19. Some fish have received transmitters and remote receivers have been deployed between Pool 3 and Pool 19. Also conducting eDNA testing in the area.

Levi Solomon evaluated the impacts bighead and silver carp are having on abundance of native species in the LaGrange reach of the Illinois River. These species were determined to be abundant enough to be “established” in 2000. Irons suggested that Asian carp abundance was impacting abundance and body condition of gizzard shad and bigmouth buffalo in 2007. Levi looked at pre- and post-establishment sampling results. There appeared to be negative impacts on white bass, bluegill, and common carp populations and positive impacts on emerald shiners, gar, and bowfin. He will continue to look at other river reaches and impacts on gizzard shad and bigmouth buffalo in the future.

Ann Runstrum gave an update on the USFWS’s Asian carp action plan. They used information from a variety of existing plans. Ann also listed specific objectives and asked for input on specific strategies.

Heidi Keuler gave an update on the Fishers and Farmers Program. The program focus is on locally-led projects. Several watersheds within the UMR basin are being targeted. The program steering committee is comprised of representatives from state and federal agencies and natural resource and farming NGO’s. Program grants are used for a variety of on-the-ground activities such as streambank protection, oxbow rehabilitation, field border establishment, etc.

Cindy Samples shared information on the 2015 Year of Fishing activities. The program objective is to get the public involved in river activities through 100 or more events on the Mississippi River. Go to www.mississippirivertrail.org for more information.

Scott Yess gave the Coordinator’s report.

Jeff Janvrin provided a recap of discussions on standardized sampling for habitat projects. Standards for pre- and post-project monitoring are needed but are difficult because of access to similar gears and because some project sites are simply tough to sample before the project is installed.

Dave Heath reported on walleye and sauger abundance and size trends in Lake Pepin and Pools 4, 8, and 9. Results vary by reach and method, but show that sauger abundance and size is increasing in some areas, while decreasing in others. Walleye abundance shows some variation as well. The data shows no change if all methods and all pools are combined. But, there is an increasing trend in secchi readings as the river has been getting clearer. He is not sure if this is affecting YOY survival, sampling efficiency, other factors, or all of the above. Both populations appear to exist at low densities, then benefit from ideal recruitment conditions and strong year classes every three to seven years.

Joel Stiras shared information on their telemetry efforts in the Mississippi, Minnesota, and St. Croix rivers. They have deployed 50 remote receivers and implanted 92 fish with transmitters. Species include both lake and shovelnose sturgeon, paddlefish, common carp, flathead catfish, smallmouth buffalo, freshwater drum, and white bass. They have documented some extensive movements, including several fish passing through the dams and using multiple rivers. They plan to continue to track tagged fish and implant the remaining 58 transmitters in 2014.

Scott Gritters shared some interesting information on what has been reported in several paddlefish guts by anglers. Anglers have sent him pictures that show numerous burrowing mayflies and even a couple of small fish being consumed by paddlefish. Scott wondered if the paddlefish were just opportunistically feeding on these prey items as it drifted down from the lock and dam, if the prey was so abundant that the paddlefish couldn't help but feed on them, or if they were targeting these items. Scott said that he had seen burrowing mayflies in the guts of other paddlefish before.

Kirk Hansen shared information on hooking mortality of the fall/winter sauger fishery below the locks and dams. Sauger make up 70% of wintertime harvest. Fish are in water 15 – 60 feet deep and barotrauma is an issue when bringing fish up from this deep water. Kirk cited a 2011 study on the UMR where 26% of hooked sauger died and mortality was directly related to the depth of capture. Kirk conducted his own test. They captured fish with traditional methods and held them to estimate mortality. The 72-hour mortality rate was 16% and mortality was associated with depth of capture. Mean capture depth was inversely related to the length of the fish. Visible signs of barotrauma did not always equate to fish mortality. If you include hooking mortality as part of the annual harvest, it accounted for 24% of the harvest.

Marvin Hubbell provided an update on the UMRR-EMP plans.

State representatives gave very brief state updates but most prepared posters of their recent work.

Travis Moore gave an update on the 2015 Annual Meeting planned for the St. Louis area. The meeting will be held in conjunction with the Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Society annual meeting. FMCS will meet from Saturday to Thursday. UMRCC will meet on Wednesday and Thursday. Wednesday's meetings will be held as one group.

The Fisheries Technical Chair duties were handed over to Scott Gritters, IADNR.